

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES GIBSON ON ABC-TV PROGRAM, "GOOD MORNING AMERICA"
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issues a few moments ago with the Defense secretary, William Perry, at the Pentagon.

(Begin videotaped segment)

Mr. Secretary, let me start with Haiti this morning. Is the president going to take the case for an invasion of Haiti to the country?

SEC. PERRY: The president is certainly going to explain to the public the reasons for his policy in Haiti, and we should be seeing that this week already.

MR. GIBSON: Do you see this as a matter of national interest, an invasion?

SEC. PERRY: Yes. Well, the hope -- the problem in Haiti is certainly a matter of national interest. Whether it needs to lead to an invasion is a very different issue. We hope it does not lead to an invasion. We are trying to solve the problem short of an invasion.

MR. GIBSON: There is opposition in Congress. There is, the polls indicate, lukewarm support from the public for an invasion. Is that the reason that the president's going to go to the public with it?

SEC. PERRY: The United Nations has taken the resolutions supporting intervention. If that option were to become necessary, it would certainly be important for the American public to understand the reasons for it.

MR. GIBSON: It is curious that we have gone to the United Nations for authorization on an invasion. We do have to go to Congress, right?

SEC. PERRY: The president has promised to consult the Congress, and he certainly will.

MR. GIBSON: Is there any sense of what the timing -- when the timing of that would be?

SEC. PERRY: I don't really want to speculate on schedules.

MR. GIBSON: I mean in terms of going to the Congress.

SEC. PERRY: No, I don't want to speculate on that, either.

MR. GIBSON: Mr. Secretary, if an invasion became necessary, how many troops is it estimated it would require?

SEC. PERRY: Charlie, these are important and interesting questions, but they have to do with operational planning, which I just can't

CHARLES GIBSON: U.S. troops are at work trying to help the people of Rwanda, and now speculation, of course, is growing that troops may see action in a possible American-led invasion of Haiti, and so I spoke about these two

discuss publicly. I'm sorry.

MR. GIBSON: The number 15,000 has been bandied about. Is that high, is that low, or is that not going to draw any comment?

SEC. PERRY: I'm sorry, no comment.

MR. GIBSON: Let me turn also to Rwanda. You've just come back from there. Why aren't more refugees returning from Zaire to Rwanda?

SEC. PERRY: Well, several tens of thousands of refugees have already returned, but that's still only a drop in the bucket, because there are several million refugees out of the country today. There are several reasons for that. I believe the underlying reason is a fear on the part of many of the refugees that they may be persecuted when they return.

We had a very important discussion with the president of Rwanda yesterday, who stated very clearly that the refugees were welcome and that there would be no reprisals. He is trying to broadcast that message now to get to the refugees. The United Nations is setting up provisions to broadcast that, and we have told the United Nations we would assist them with technical facilities to help get that communication across.

MR. GIBSON: Do you take him at his word? Do you think it is safe for them to go back, or is there also some danger from the remnants of the Hutu militia that is now in the refugee camps themselves?

SEC. PERRY: This is still an unsettled country, Charlie, and still a very important peacekeeping operation is going to be needed by the United Nations to help ensure peace and stability of that country. To that end, we talked with General Delere when we were there, who is the United Nations commander of the so-called UNAMIR, the peacekeeping forces. He expects to have a peacekeeping force of 4,000 troops by the middle of August. That should make a big difference in that regard.

MR. GIBSON: And it would be 4,000? There was some question -- 3,000, 4,000.

SEC. PERRY: Four thousand one hundred is the actual number that he is shooting for.

MR. GIBSON: And a sense of how long they'll be needed?

SEC. PERRY: I don't have any sense of how long. That's probably -- that could be many months. That U.N. force will not have U.S. soldiers in it, although we have offered to provide logistics assistance to other nations to bring their forces to Rwanda.

MR. GIBSON: These forces are being deployed on what sense? With the sense that the long-term problem is inside Rwanda itself and that eventually the concerns about Zaire will begin to diminish, or what is the long-term prognosis there?

SEC. PERRY: Well, the international -- the U.N. peacekeeping forces being deployed in Rwanda with the belief that as the refugees come back they may be necessary in order to keep the stability in that country, the forces which the U.S. have deployed in Uganda, a few hundred in Rwanda, and a few hundred in Zaire have been for the purposes of providing the relief -- assisting the relief operation. That's a very different aspect of the situation.

MR. GIBSON: Is there any concern that this is in any way a rebirth, or could be, of a Somalian-type situation?

SEC. PERRY: I think the two situations are very different. Certainly the U.S. involvement in this operation is the involvement in the relief operation. We are assisting the international organizations, the private relief organizations, by providing that capability which the United States military uniquely has -- this vast airlift capability we have -- of bringing in the supplies. This is something which, had we not done, thousands more people would have died waiting for the medicine, waiting for the pure water to get in.

MR. GIBSON: Mr. Secretary, good to talk to you again. Thank you for joining us.

SEC. PERRY: Nice to talk to you, Charlie.

MR. GIBSON: Appreciate it.

(End videotaped segment)

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